

# Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



## Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River

Jennifer S.H. Brown et Maureen Matthews

Volume 4, numéro 1, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031056ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031056ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Brown, J. S. & Matthews, M. (1993). Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 4(1), 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031056ar>

Résumé de l'article

Au cours de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, la réputation de l'Ojibwa Fair Wind (Naamiwan), guérisseur et chef spirituel vivant le long de la rivière Berens, qui s'écoule entre le Manitoba et le nord-ouest de l'Ontario, prit un essor considérable. C'est dans les années 1930 qu'il fit la connaissance de l'anthropologue américain A. Irving Hallowell dont les écrits et les photographies attirèrent pour la première fois notre attention sur sa vie et sur la signification d'un rituel du tambour particulier, originaire du Minnesota des années 1870s. Ce portrait de la vie de Fair Wind utilise les souvenirs de ses descendants de même que les notes laissées par Hallowell, par les nombreux missionnaires, trafiquants de fourrures, et autres personnes qui visitèrent la région durant sa longue vie (1851-1944) pour étudier la nature de son autorité religieuse.

# Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River

JENNIFER S.H. BROWN IN COLLABORATION WITH  
MAUREEN MATTHEWS

## Résumé

*Fair Wind (Naamiwan) was an Ojibwa healer and leader widely known along the Berens River of Manitoba and northwestern Ontario in the early to mid-twentieth century. In the 1930s he became acquainted with the American anthropologist, A. Irving Hallowell, whose writings and photographs first drew our attention to Fair Wind's life and to the significance of his distinctive drum ceremonial, the roots of which extended to the Drum Dance that originated in Minnesota in the 1870s. This paper traces his life and explores the nature of his religious leadership, drawing upon the recollections of his descendants as well as on the records left by Hallowell and the numerous fur traders, missionaries, and others who visited the region during his long lifetime (1851-1944).*

\* \* \* \*

*Au cours de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, la réputation de l'Ojibwa Fair Wind (Naamiwan), guérisseur et chef spirituel vivant le long de la rivière Berens, qui s'écoule entre le Manitoba et le nord-ouest de l'Ontario, prit un essor considérable. C'est dans les années 1930 qu'il fit la connaissance de l'anthropologue américain A. Irving Hallowell dont les écrits et les photographies attirèrent pour la première fois notre attention sur sa vie et sur la signification d'un rituel du tambour particulier, originaire du Minnesota des années 1870s. Ce portrait de la vie de Fair Wind utilise les souvenirs de ses descendants de même que les notes laissées par Hallowell, par les nombreux*

---

We wish to acknowledge the numerous residents of Pikangikum, Poplar Hill, and Pauingassi whose knowledge so enriched our understandings of Fair Wind; the notes cite the individuals whose information appears here, and we hope we have got it right. Special thanks to Roger Roulette of the Manitoba Association for Native Languages and to Margaret Simmons of the Southeast Tribal School Division for their translations and interpretations of the Ojibwa conversations recorded by Maureen Matthews, and to John Nichols of the University of Manitoba for help on linguistic points. Thanks also to CBC Radio for the use of technical equipment and assistance and for support from the radio program, Ideas. Our thanks as well to Beth Carroll-Horrocks and Martin Levitt of the American Philosophical Society, and to Diane Haglund of the United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, for valued archival assistance; and to John Richthammer, curator of the Red Lake Museum, Ontario, and Thomas Vennum of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., for all their information and help on drums and related materials. Finally, our warm gratitude to Gary Butikofer, former schoolteacher at Poplar Hill, who freely shared with us his detailed family and community history files, and to Henry Neufeld of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada whose knowledge of Pauingassi was immensely helpful.

*missionnaires, trafiquants de fourrures, et autres personnes qui visitèrent la région durant sa longue vie (1851-1944) pour étudier la nature de son autorité religieuse.*

Sometime after 1900, an Ojibwa named Fair Wind (Naamiwan, or in English, John Owen)<sup>1</sup> became widely known along the Berens River in Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. Celebrated in some quarters, notorious in others, Fair Wind never evoked indifference among those who knew him. His personality, his powers, and above all, his Drum Dance with its powerful big drum brought regional prominence to his home community of Pauingassi, a small Ojibwa settlement about ten miles north of Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba. The threads of his extensive family connections are interwoven with the histories of many Berens River people to the present day.

Fair Wind and his life present problems for biography. Although he had numerous non-Ojibwa acquaintances, most left little or no record of him. A few penned highly coloured vignettes which reveal as much about the authors themselves as about Fair Wind. The American anthropologist, A. Irving Hallowell, who met Fair Wind in 1933, went furthest towards giving him a place in written history in an ethnological context.<sup>2</sup> But other outside observers left only scattered reference points, dots to connect by lines, as in a child's pencil game. For them as for most outsiders, Indians had no history — an attitude still sometimes found among teachers and others who work in their communities.

The memories that the Berens River people preserve about Fair Wind also present challenges. Their stories, as is usual in oral traditions, do not emphasize the telling of a whole life.<sup>3</sup> Ojibwa recollections of him are thematic and situational. They include stories of healing or of danger, reflecting the tellers' closeness to or distance from him and his family. They recall impressive moments, memorable events, such as the times when thunder spoke to him, or when he played the big drum at Pauingassi or at Poplar Hill

- 
1. Fair Wind's burial record dates his birth to 5 March 1851 and his death to 18 March 1944; he was buried under his English name, John Owen, at Pauingassi on 21 March (burial no. 64, United Church registers, Little Grand Rapids, United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, University of Winnipeg). No baptismal record has yet been found, although one mission account claimed his conversion to Christianity. The calendrical birthdate may reflect memories of the season of his birth.
  2. Hallowell's only published discussion of Fair Wind and his drum appeared in "Spirits of the Dead in Saulteaux Life and Thought," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 70 (1940): 29-51, which was reprinted as chapter 7 in *Culture and Experience* (Philadelphia, 1955). In his posthumously published *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History* (Fort Worth, 1992), ed. by Jennifer S.H. Brown, figures 13, 14, and 15 illustrate Fair Wind and his drum ceremony.
  3. Amid the growing literature on issues of Native (auto)biography, see H. David Brumble III, *American Indian Autobiography* (Berkeley, 1988); David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington, 1991); and Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley, 1985).

farther up the Berens River.<sup>4</sup> Together, they offer sightings and triangulations which contribute to a more complex, stereoscopic image of his life. All our views of Fair Wind, however, are mediated, refracted through the multiple lenses of his varied observers.

Fair Wind came of an extraordinary family. His father was Shenawakoshkank (Making a Rattling Noise by Stepping on a Twig), also known as Kihchi omoosoni (Great Moose), who was probably born no later than the 1820s. Great Moose (to use the simplest English form of his name) was from the Lac Seul region to the east, according to A.I. Hallowell. He had six wives, more than any other man within local memory, and by five of them he fathered a total of twenty children, of whom sixteen lived into the post-treaty period after 1876. None of the women were blood sisters — a contrast to the sororal polygyny common among men with several wives. Three wives had fathers of the Pelican sib or clan (Hallowell's terminology); of the others, one was a Kingfisher and another a Sturgeon. Hallowell did not learn the totem of Fair Wind's mother, Mankihtikwaan, who died around 1914-15.<sup>5</sup> Great Moose himself was of the Moose clan, members of which had resided in the area (as had Pelicans and Suckers) since before 1815.<sup>6</sup>

Great Moose, so Hallowell was told, was "a noted hunter and also the most famous conjurer of his time" in the area. He also had a secular role as a "barter chief" when trading with the Hudson's Bay Company. As such, he received (as did similar Cree leaders along Hudson Bay) a trading captain's coat and other gifts for his yearly assistance in bringing his people's furs to the post.<sup>7</sup> In Ojibwa belief, hunting success and spiritual powers were closely associated and could entitle a man to have more wives than others. Expanded family connections in turn enlarged the prospects for gathering furs from kinsmen, and for more effective bargaining with HBC or other traders. The successes of Great Moose in several domains must have reinforced his position in all of them. His

- 
4. The drum story is the subject of a two-hour CBC radio program, "The Search for Fairwind's Drum," produced by Maureen Matthews for Ideas and aired in May 1993 (transcript available from CBC Radio, Box 500, Station "A", Toronto, Ont. M5W 1E6).
  5. Hallowell published some information on Great Moose and his wives in "The Incidence, Character, and Decline of Polygyny among the Lake Winnipeg Cree and Saulteaux," *American Anthropologist*, 40 (1938): 235-256, transcribing his alternate name as Cenawagwaskang. The wives' names and totems are in his notes on Moose genealogy under Indian Linguistics, file 2, A. Irving Hallowell Papers, Ms. Coll. 26, American Philosophical Society (APS), Philadelphia. Gary Butikofer, who taught school at Poplar Hill, Ontario, from 1970 to 1990 and visited Pauingassi, kindly shared with us his detailed family histories based on data from descendants, Indian Affairs records, and other sources. Residents of Poplar Hill and Pauingassi who talked with us in 1992 and 1993 confirmed and supplemented his information.
  6. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) B. 16/e/1, fos. 6-6d, Report on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winipic, 1815, by George Holdsworth, who added that several families of Kingfishers lived a little farther south, along the Bloodvein River.
  7. Hallowell, "Polygyny," 250, 252. The barter chiefs described by Hallowell's informants parallel the Cree trading captains portrayed by Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz in *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600-1870* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), 41-46.

roles and rank compare with those of other Ojibwa and Ojibwa-Cree leaders remembered as progenitors of leading families and local groups in the region: Yellow Legs, founder of the Berens family on Lake Winnipeg; Crane, whose sixteen or more sons and other descendants created the group known as the Cranes in the Weagamow Lake region; and Jack Fiddler, who had five wives and dominated the Suckers of Sandy and Deer lakes.<sup>8</sup> (The wives played essential economic and familial roles, but their husbands and sons were the holders of prestige and power.)

It is doubtful that all six wives of Great Moose co-resided with him for long. Two wives died before the family appeared on the first treaty lists in 1876, and the last two survivors, one of whom was Fair Wind's mother, died in 1914-1915.<sup>9</sup> Hollowell was told that the family had lived in a shabandawan, an elongated wigwam of poles covered with birchbark, which had an entrance at each end and three fires within. Great Moose sat at the central fire, with two wives on each side of him and one on the other side of the left and righthand fires. This arrangement allowed the wives easy access to the entrances; they also thus avoided the centre of the dwelling, observing the usual women's taboo against "stepping over [their husband's] legs and belongings, which was strictly forbidden."<sup>10</sup> Great Moose "supported them well," Hollowell was informed: "Every woman had to have a 4 pt. HB [Hudson's Bay] blanket, besides cloth for dresses & handkerchiefs - [he] never wasted time snaring rabbits - women did this & caught fish - [he] caught big game, moose, caribou & beaver."<sup>11</sup>

Great Moose and his family were the earliest remembered residents of Pauingassi. The locale offered good resources to the family, which was already quite large by the time Fair Wind was born in 1851. Pauingassi is on the west side of Fishing Lake, which lies just north of Little Grand Rapids. The settlement occupies a flat, sandy peninsula elevated above a shoreline of smooth granite rocks and beach. It is relatively sheltered from prevailing winds and has an eastern and southern exposure. It also strategically overlooks a main channel on the water route from the Berens River to Deer Lake and Sandy Lake in the Severn River watershed. The population of Pauingassi, like those of other similar communities, fluctuated; it rose greatly during the summer fishing season. In winter, most of its residents dispersed to their hunting and trapping grounds.<sup>12</sup>

---

8. On Yellow Legs, see Hollowell, *Ojibwa*, 11-12. On Crane, see Edward S. Rogers and Mary Black Rogers, "Who Were the Cranes? Groups and Group Identity Names in Northern Ontario," *Approaches to Algonquian Archaeology* (Calgary, 1982), ed. by Margaret G. Hanna and Brian Kooyman, 147-188. On Jack Fiddler, see Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, *Killing the Shaman* (Moonbeam, Ont., 1985), 41-42 and passim.

9. Hollowell found a maximum of four wives listed in the 1876 and 1877 treaty paylists ("Polygyny," table 1, 240). Reconstruction of other details comes from Butikofer's unpublished family histories, which drew on Hollowell's notes as well as on oral and Indian Affairs sources.

10. Hollowell, *Ojibwa*, 105; figures 21 and 22 (106-107) illustrate the shabandawan dwelling type.

11. Hollowell Papers, Indian Linguistics, file 2, APS

12. Hollowell, *Ojibwa*, 43-50

When Fair Wind was very young, he would have gone through the naming ceremony customary for Ojibwa infants. He received his name from a man of the same name who belonged to the Kingfisher clan. According to Hallowell, the older Fair Wind had come, as did Great Moose, from the Lac Seul area and became a “fur chief” at the HBC post at the mouth of the Berens River.<sup>13</sup> The name Fair Wind or Down Wind (‘Naamiwan’) refers to a favourable breeze, as when water travel is helped by a following wind, or as when a hunter finds himself downwind from an animal which thus cannot hear or smell his presence.<sup>14</sup> By Ojibwa custom, the older Fair Wind would have stood in a grandfatherly relationship to his namesake, a clue that the infant’s mother was also a Kingfisher. In this role, the name-giver brought benefits to the child, passing on blessings that he himself had received in dreams from his pawaganak, the other-than-human spirit beings to whom he owed his powers.<sup>15</sup>

Around the age of ten to fourteen, Fair Wind, like other Ojibwa boys of his generation, would have gone on a vision fast for a week or more. Sleeping alone in a tree on a small platform built for him probably by his father, he sought blessings from whichever pawaganak might benignly grant him their powers and assistance.<sup>16</sup> Successful dreamers could not reveal the content of their visions if they hoped to keep the blessings conferred by their dream visitors. Often, however, the identities (and powers) of a man’s helping spirits were surmised by others who observed his activities and spiritual affiliations.

Fair Wind appeared to have a special affinity with Thunderbirds. In July 1932, when Hallowell visited Little Grand Rapids for the first time, one of his Ojibwa travelling companions, John James Everett, told him about an event that he had witnessed during a storm at Pauingassi twenty-one summers before. As Fair Wind was sitting in his tent, thunder sounded. A Thunderbird (pinesi) was asking him (as he explained to his wife, Koowin) “whether I have a pipe & why I don’t give him a smoke.” He told Koowin to bring his long ceremonial pipe and firebag with tobacco, flint and steel, and punk; and a servant (oskabewis, a name used for any helper to a religious leader) filled and lit the pipe. Fair Wind took a few puffs, “then lifted [the] stem over [his] bowed head - swung it around clockwise (everyone quiet . . . no smiling - very very solemn).” Keeping his head bowed, he prayed and “asked pardon from thunder - pleading for himself.” Everett decided that “pinesi must have been his pawagan.” As Hallowell later concluded, “This explains why he thought he was addressed. By and large, the Ojibwa do not attune themselves to receiving messages every time a thunderstorm occurs!”<sup>17</sup>

---

13. Hallowell Papers, Indian Linguistics, file 2, APS. “Fairwind” is mentioned at intervals in Berens River post journals of the 1860s (e.g., HBCA B. 16/a/5-6, 1863-66).

14. Roger Roulette of the Manitoba Association for Native Languages, Winnipeg, provided information on and suggested the orthography for ‘Naamiwan’.

15. Hallowell, *Ojibwa*, 58-59

16. *Ibid*, 87-88

17. Hallowell Papers, Fieldnotes, 10 July 1932, APS; Hallowell, “The Role of Dreams in Ojibwa Culture,” 459; 1966 article reprinted as chapter 11 in *Contributions to Anthropology: Selected Papers of A. Irving Hallowell* (Chicago, 1976).

Everett dated the Thunderbird episode to 1911, when Fair Wind was about sixty. By that time, Fair Wind held a respected position as a familial leader and grandfather. Great Moose had died in 1881-82 and some of his descendants moved away, but among those who continued living at Pauingassi, Fair Wind assumed a leading role. He had married Koowin, a Pelican, by the mid-1870s, and in the next fifteen years they had six children, of whom four sons and a daughter survived into the 1950s or 1960s.<sup>18</sup>

Fair Wind also gained respect for his medicinal knowledge which, in the Ojibwa frame of reference, was granted to individuals by other-than-human beings such as Thunderbirds. In his older years, he became a powerful healer. One winter in around the 1920s, a Cree named Tom Boulanger was trapping at Charron Lake, about forty miles north of Pauingassi, when he became ill with pneumonia. As he later remembered, a man from Little Grand Rapids told him, "the best way to do is to take me to Powgashee and see the old man Fairwin." He was bundled into a sleigh, and on arriving at Pauingassi, presented Fair Wind "tobacco and matches, a new pipe, and some new clothes from the store." The next day, Fair Wind's sons brought some roots from the shore and Fair Wind boiled them, adding "a power medicine, about half a teaspoon." Boulanger, a baptized Methodist, was impressed that Fair Wind prayed before giving him the medicine to drink. In four days he was better but stayed on several days, enjoying the stories that Fair Wind told "about his old times."<sup>19</sup>

One of those stories confirmed Fair Wind's powers in hunting as well as curing. One winter when he had two children (about 1880), his family was starving, "just a rabbit at home to eat." After hunting in vain, he slept out one night, some distance from their camp. Towards morning, he dreamed that "somebody like a man" spoke to him, directing him to a lake which he found the next day. Near the shore, he saw a group of caribou on a high rock. He was able to shoot six of them and brought his family to camp beside the new supply of meat.<sup>20</sup>

From the 1880s on, Fair Wind and his family interacted increasingly with outsiders. Active in the fur trade, they evoked mixed sentiments from the Hudson's Bay Company manager at Little Grand Rapids.<sup>21</sup> In 1912-1914, they were carrying on business both with the HBC and with an independent trader, George Leyound, who was based on the Bloodvein River to the south. Fair Wind himself often traded at the Little Grand Rapids post with members of his "Powngassie tribe." But periodically, his son, Angus Owen, and other kin bypassed the HBC on visits to Leyound while his nephew, Moses Owen, took on the role of being "the Company's trader at Powngassi." On 18 February 1913,

---

18. Genealogical notes by Gary Butikofer, based on treaty lists, research notes of Hallowell, and oral data.

19. Tom Boulanger, *An Indian Remembers: My Life as a Trapper in Northern Manitoba* (Winnipeg 1971), 63-64.

20. *Ibid*, 64

21. For example, HBCA B. 18/d/6-9, Indian Ledgers 1895-1899 for Big Fall (Little Grand Rapids) contain numerous references to Fair Wind and his oldest son, Angus.

the frustration of the HBC journal keeper, William Chapman, in dealing with the Owens reached a peak. "Fairwind's crowd at Powngassie," he wrote, "are the most awkward crowd in the L.G.R. band. They have received faultless treatment . . . they were given big Fall debts, and an outfit has been kept at [their] Settlement. Old Fairwind himself is not so bad as far as paying debt is concerned; but he has too big an opinion of the Ego."<sup>22</sup> Both the Owens and rival free traders challenged, if with mixed success, HBC dominance along the Berens River. In a later instance, the HBC manager at the mouth of the river referred on 5 December 1927 to another rival, "the Jew Sam Arbor" whose men were visiting "the Owens camp" at Pauingassi, among others.<sup>23</sup> The Owens' lack of subservience to the HBC and other traders does not evoke the Native dependency sometimes assumed for recent periods; while they relied on numerous imported goods, they bargained with all comers and attended effectively to their own interests.

Fur traders were not the only outsiders to take notice of the Pauingassi area by the early 1900s. For several decades, Methodist missionaries had been developing an interest in the region. In 1873-74, Rev. Egerton R. Young, who had spent five years with the Cree at the Rossville mission at Norway House, founded the first mission at the mouth of the Berens River. Young's interest in the Ojibwa had been sparked while he was still at Rossville. In July 1871, several "Saulteaux" Indians from up the Berens River had come to see him there and asked him to visit them the following winter. Young was astonished to find that although they had never seen a missionary, they were able to read the Cree syllabics that his predecessor, James Evans, had developed in the 1840s for printing hymns and bibles. They had learned them, they said, from Christian Indians whom they met on their winter hunts, and had since acquired a few Cree syllabic bibles on a visit to York Factory. On the strength of their demonstrated knowledge, Young baptized them, unfortunately recording no names or surnames except for number 1439, "Alexander Bushy," who may well have been the Alex Boucher (Poshi) who lived around Little Grand Rapids in that period.<sup>24</sup>

In February 1872, Young made a trip down Lake Winnipeg and up the Berens River and visited some of the men who had called upon him at Rossville. Although his writings are vague on geography, he must have reached Little Grand Rapids and the Pauingassi vicinity. Possibly he also worked his way northeast towards Deer Lake and the Severn River drainage whose inhabitants sometimes visited York Factory. At any rate, the

---

22. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG 1 C5, fur trade journal, Little Grand Rapids, 1912-1915, p. 78.

23. HBCA B. 16/a/13, fo. 15, Berens River journal 1927-28. Owen as a surname for Fair Wind's family was in use by about 1910; it may have arisen from the last two syllables of his Ojibwa name, Naamiwan, which was variously transcribed as Namoen, Namawun, and Namiwan.

24. Young, *Stories from Indian Wigwams and Northern Camp-fires* (Toronto, n.d.), 104-109. When Young recorded these baptisms, he wrote across the column for parents' names, "Unknown wild Saulteaux"; Bushy was the only surname entered (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, GR 1212, Vital Statistics, Rossville, baptismal register, 1433-1440). Information on Alex Boucher from Gary Butikofer, manuscript family histories.



Pauingassi people doubtless heard about “the first missionary to visit this interesting people,” as Young put it; among Aboriginal people of the region, communication networks operated with remarkable efficiency, as the spread of the syllabic writing had already indicated.<sup>25</sup> Later, while stationed at Berens River, Young made two further trips up to Little Grand Rapids and its vicinity. One February, he visited a “Saulteaux chieftainess,” Ookemasis, who had come to him the previous summer to learn about his religion.<sup>26</sup> Between 4 and 14 April 1876 he again journeyed to Little Grand Rapids, preaching to Indians in the area.<sup>27</sup> His visits, and those of upriver people to his mission, were the first in a long chain of encounters between missionaries and the upriver Ojibwa, with results which have run the gamut from confrontation or avoidance to dialogue and conversion or creative syncretism.

The question of visitors and contacts is basic to understanding how Fair Wind became a religious innovator of special note in the last thirty years of his life, from about 1914 onwards. The groundwork for his reputation was laid within his local community, building on his father’s family ties and on his own spiritual kinship with Thunderbirds who, as his dreamed helpers (pawaganak), had the standing of grandfathers. His hunting prowess and curing abilities also affirmed to others his connections with strong other-than-human beings. Late in life, however, Fair Wind also drew widely upon ideas, both Ojibwa and non-Ojibwa, Christian and non-Christian, whose roots lay a long way from Berens River. In about 1914, a powerful dream led him to initiate a drum dance which combined local and individual innovation with religious influences whose origins lay several hundred miles to the south.

The external ideas that influenced Fair Wind’s Drum Dance were probably introduced to the locality by visitors, for although Fair Wind had worked on the HBC York boats, he rarely travelled in later life. His grand-nephew, Jacob Owen, recalled that Fair Wind in his youth made periodic trips as far as the mouth of the Berens River. He added enigmatically, “Oh, maybe someday long time ago he go to Norway House and the ocean. He was gone the whole summer that time, almost whole summer - old people long time.” But most of the time, Fair Wind didn’t leave “because he have something here, that’s why he not want to go.” The something was medicine, which he found in

---

25. Young, *Stories*, 109-113. Knowledge of the Cree syllabics had spread in 1842-43 through their adoption into a prophetic movement led by a Severn River Cree, Abishabis; his influence reached from Churchill to James Bay and lingered long after his death in 1843. See J.S.H. Brown, “Abishabis,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VII, 3-4 (Toronto, 1988)

26. Young, *On the Indian Trail: Stories of Missionary Work among the Cree and Saulteaux Indians* (New York, 1897), 194-202. A shorter account is in his *By Canoe and Dog-Train among the Cree and Saulteaux Indians* (New York, 1890), 262-265.

27. HBCA B. 16/a/8, fo. 10, Berens River post journal, records Young’s departure from and return to Berens River. Young later described an April journey far inland in heroic terms in *Stories from Indian Wigwams*, chapter 14, but these ten days, given the travel involved, would have permitted only short visits to Little Grand Rapids and perhaps Pauingassi or other nearby camps.

such places as a sandy spit at Pauingassi and on a nearby island; every fall he gave medicine to people to protect them through the winter on the traplines. Many came to Pauingassi for his remedies, and he had everything he needed close by.<sup>28</sup> And he surely talked with and learned from his patients; indeed, he encouraged them to extend their visits, if we may judge by the example of Tom Boulanger, mentioned earlier.

Most patients or other visitors were doubtless from within the region. In about 1912, however, one Aboriginal newcomer who came from farther afield had a considerable impact on both Little Grand Rapids, and perhaps more indirectly, on Fair Wind and Pauingassi. Hallowell recorded his name in 1932 as Niskatwewitang or 'when pines [thunderbird] calls there is always rain.' He spoke both Saulteaux and English well, but Hallowell could not learn what community he came from. At Little Grand Rapids, the visitor introduced a give-away dance which, Hallowell wrote, "has proved exceedingly popular." He charged one hundred dollars to make the drum and "supply the proper songs."<sup>29</sup>

Hallowell's notes on this man tell us nothing more. There is no sign that he came from Berens River (the community at the mouth of the river); indeed, the big drums which became part of life at Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi were unknown on that reserve, probably in part because of its Christian churches and visibility to white authorities. Some residents of Little Grand Rapids, however, remember his name and origin. David Eaglestick's grandfather had a brother named Naaskaatwewitank who came from Jackhead on the west side of Lake Winnipeg.<sup>30</sup> Possibly, he brought the drum to Little Grand Rapids via the Bloodvein River, the next major river to the south, following the same route as Fair Wind's family members when they went to Bloodvein to trade with George Leyound.

It is of interest that the dance was introduced at Little Grand Rapids in a period when an amendment to the Canadian Indian Act prohibited such ceremonies. Its adoption on the upper Berens River suggests how unevenly the law against Indian ceremonials was enforced;<sup>31</sup> Indian Affairs agents and police seemingly took no action against Drum Dances in this area. Government suppression of such observances on the Plains and Northwest Coast was sometimes harsh; and at both the Jackhead and Bloodvein reserves on Lake Winnipeg, give-away dances and drums drew police intervention in 1920-21.<sup>32</sup>

---

28. Jacob Owen to Maureen Matthews, 17 October 1992, Pauingassi.

29. Hallowell Papers, Fieldnotes, 10 July 1932, APS, information initialled as from W.B. (Chief William Berens).

30. David Eaglestick to Henry Neufeld, 20 May 1993, Little Grand Rapids. At Jackhead on 13 December 1993, several people recognized photographs of the Little Grand Rapids drums and told Roger Roulette and Maureen Matthews of memories of "Niiskaatwewitang" or Edward Thomas. Originally from Roseau River, Manitoba, he was a powerful healer.

31. For comparative discussion and context, see J.R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy," *Ethnohistory*, 37 (1990): 386-415.

32. Katherine Pettipas has kindly shared her research notes on Jackhead and Bloodvein from the National Archives of Canada, RG 10, vol. 3826, file 60, 511-4, 4a.

Up the Berens River, however, the law went unmentioned and perhaps even unknown to many residents. Indeed, the United Church missionary, Luther Schuetze, who was serving at Little Grand Rapids when Hallowell visited in the 1930s, declared that these dances in the open air were far more healthful than “modern dancing” with fiddles and guitars in small, overcrowded houses. “I was all for them,” he wrote, “if they were done in a thankful mood of happiness.”<sup>33</sup>

Neither Schuetze nor Hallowell explored the immediate or more distant origins of the Drum Dances at Little Grand Rapids. More recent studies suggest, however, that in their main features they closely paralleled the Ojibwa dream drum ceremonies which began to spread in Minnesota and Wisconsin in the 1870s. Stories of how those dances began all have a common theme. “Somewhere to the west,” Tailfeather Woman, a Sioux, was fleeing the site of a battle where white soldiers had killed her people, including her four sons. While hiding among waterlilies in a lake, she was instructed in a dream about how to make a large drum and learned the songs to go with it. She taught others, and the ceremony became the vehicle for making peace between the Sioux and the Ojibwa. When white soldiers heard the sound of the drum, “they put down their arms, stood still and stopped the killing.” Thomas Vennum has traced in detail the elaboration of the Drum Dance and its spiritually mandated transmittal from one community to another over the next decades.<sup>34</sup>

The most conspicuous example of the Drum Dance among Ojibwa north of Minnesota was evidently Maggie Wilson’s dance, given to her by Thunderbirds in dreams in the fall of 1914. Anthropologist Ruth Landes recorded in detail Wilson’s account of her dreams and the resulting dance ceremony at Manitou Reserve near Emo, Ontario; it attracted wide attention in the region during the years it was performed (1918 to about 1929).<sup>35</sup> The ideas that Maggie Wilson drew upon were clearly circulating along the Rainy River and in the Lake of the Woods area, and Ojibwa people could easily have carried news of them farther north to Jackhead and the Bloodvein River by means of the Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg. Her dance drew contradictory responses from the local white authorities. The Anglican missionary at Emo inhibited her learning still more songs through dreams; “[he] scared me,” she said, “saying the devil was after me.” But when the Thunderbirds encouraged her to give the dance more often, she recalled that the Indian agent helped; “We gave it at the ball ground near Fort Frances and charged twenty-five cents admission. We all shared and did well.”<sup>36</sup>

By the time Hallowell visited Little Grand Rapids in 1932, three or four large drums were being used in ceremonies by men of different families. Hallowell’s photographs

---

33. Schuetze, unpublished memoir, 24, United Church Archives, University of Winnipeg.

34. Vennum, *The Ojibwa Dance Drum: Its History and Construction* (Washington, 1982), 44-47.

35. Landes, *Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin* (Madison, 1968), 207-213. Landes recorded this information in 1932, the year of Hallowell’s first trip up the Berens River, but there is no sign that they compared data on the subject.

36. *Ibid*, 212

show that these drums were of the same style as those already established in Minnesota and Wisconsin, though he lacked the data to make comparisons. The visit of Naaskaatwewitank, mentioned above, provides a plausible date for the arrival of the Drum Dance in the community. And in early October of 1912, Hudson's Bay Company trader William Chapman wrote that the Indians there were drumming and holding a Dog Feast, which, according to Thomas Vennum, was often associated with the Drum Dances.<sup>37</sup>

As a frequent visitor to Little Grand Rapids, Fair Wind was well acquainted with what went on there, while maintaining his own medicinal practice and ceremonies at Pauingassi. Sometime around 1914, however, his confidence in his powers was severely tested. Two of his sons, Aankas (Angus Owen) and Waanachensh (Alex Owen Sr.) had married daughters of Pachahkaano (Timothy Keeper) of Little Grand Rapids. Aankas and his wife, Red Bird, never had children. Waanachensh and his wife, Pikochiish, had a son in about 1912, their firstborn and Fair Wind's first grandson. Two winters later the boy died. The recital of the story of his death and its consequences became a part of the ceremony that grew out of the tragic event — Fair Wind's Drum Dance. When Hallowell saw the dance at Pauingassi in 1933, he wrote down as closely as he could the story as Fair Wind told it:

I tried to cure him, but I found I was unable to help him. Others tried too, but they also failed. . . . Then one day he slept away. After that, I was full of grief. One day I was away in the bush by myself. The tears were running down my cheeks all the time, thinking about this boy. I put down my gun and my mittens. I made up my mind to die. I lay down on the point of a rock, where I could be found. . . . When I looked toward the east, I heard something saying: 'This is something that will stop you from crying. You'll not die. For this is one of the finest things to play with.'<sup>38</sup>

This vision, which is still told in all its particulars by Fair Wind's grandchildren in Pauingassi, led to the building of his big drum by his four sons, Angus, Alex, Jamsie (James Bear Hair Owen), and James Owen (Wechaanimaash). It was larger than most dream drums and constructed rather differently; but the drums were never identical — each reflected to an extent the idiosyncratic vision of the dreamer. In its glory days, it was beautifully decorated. Around the sides, tinkling cones, dog-harness bells, large beads, tufts of feathers, ribbons, and an upper and lower rim of fur were all mounted over a wrapping of bright red and blue tartan cloth.

---

37. PAM, MG 1 C5, HBC journal, Little Grand Rapids, pp. 45-46, 9-11 October 1912 (text much damaged and faded). Joe Leveque of Little Grand Rapids told Gary Butikofer that he knew of four drums played there in the past (interview, 1 July 1990, unpublished notes of Butikofer). One, which belonged to John Keeper, is illustrated in Vennum, 39, fig. 10, and another in Hallowell, *Ojibwa*, 101, fig. 18. On the Dog Feast, see Vennum, 109-112.

38. Hallowell, "Spirits of the Dead in Saulteaux Life and Thought," *Culture and Experience*, 166.

Most distinctive about Fair Wind's dance was the pavilion in which it was held — a circular, open lattice-work dome of willow or poplar saplings curving up to a central opening under which the drum and its four drummers sat. In building technique, the structure resembled the older Midewiwin and Wabano longhouses well known in Ojibwa country, while its form recalled the small circular sweat lodges, the family dwelling type known as the *waginogan*, and the conical shaking tent. It was unique, however, in its large size — twenty to thirty feet in diameter. The pavilion became the hallmark of the ceremony at Pauingassi, and later at Poplar Hill, up the river towards Pikangikum.<sup>39</sup>

Fair Wind's Drum Dance was probably first performed in the summer of 1914, but the only written sources which help to verify the date come from a missionary whose historical details are overshadowed by his strong Methodistical opinions. The Rev. Frederick G. Stevens visited Pauingassi in the summers of both 1913 and 1914, on trips to and from the Sucker people at Deer Lake, a few days' canoe travel northeast of Little Grand Rapids. Stevens was confident that the Suckers, influenced by the conversion of one of their leading men, Adam Fiddler, were on the road to Christianity. In polar contrast to Fiddler, however, was his portrait of "Namawun" [Fair Wind], "a celebrated conjuror" who "with his women, sons, and daughters lived at Opowangasse, and held the Indians round about in terror." Influenced by the Deer Lakers' negative views of the Pauingassi people, Stevens wrote that the two groups were "old time enemies." Fair Wind "had his camp on a sandy bluff, at the narrows of the lake. Like the old robber barons in Europe of old, he from his wigwam (castle) demanded tribute from all passers by. He threatened dire consequences to any who would dare to pass by without landing," and especially, it seemed, to the people around Deer Lake.<sup>40</sup>

The maintaining of control over a waterway and the assessing of "tolls" to strangers was noticed by Europeans as a custom of local Aboriginal leaders from times of earliest contact; and such controls and implicit boundaries between local groups doubtless existed here, as for the more northeasterly Cranes and their neighbours.<sup>41</sup> The question at hand, however, is what Stevens saw at Pauingassi; had the large round pavilion been built, and was the big drum being played in it? Among other things, Stevens described

---

39. Fair Wind's grand-nephew Jacob Owen, born in about 1909, recalled that the drum was built by Fair Wind's sons when he was a small boy; "Angus was the oldest and the boss of the operation" (Owen to Gary Butikofer, 28 March 1977). For pictures of the drum and pavilion see Hallowell, *Ojibwa*, 77, 78, figures 13 and 14. The drum (damaged and unused since the 1970s) is now in the Red Lake Museum, Ontario.

40. United Church Archives, Victoria University, Toronto, F.G. Stevens Fonds, Box 1, File 25 (86.198C). Unpublished typescript autobiography, 47-49.

41. Olive P. Dickason in *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto, 1992), 100, 126, calls attention to "Amerindian trade protocol" as practised by the Iroquoians of the 1500s on the St. Lawrence, and later by Tessouat on the Ottawa River. On the Cranes and social boundary markers, see Mary Black-Rogers and Edward S. Rogers, "The Cranes and their Neighbours, 1770-1970: Trouble Case Data for Tracing We-They Boundaries of the Northern Ojibwa," in *Actes du Quatorzième Congrès de Algonquistes*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, 1983), 91-125.

“an extra long Salteaux structure . . . perhaps eighteen by thirty feet.” In it lived Fair Wind and “his wives” (an invented plural - other sources mention only one), and their children and spouses and grandchildren; the residence, he added without explanation, was also “used as a conjuring tent.”<sup>42</sup> This may have been a large shabandawan such as Fair Wind’s father and wives had occupied. It was clearly not the round pavilion or the enormous Wabano longhouse which Hallowell photographed there in 1933; the latter structure was not a dwelling and its dimensions appeared more on the order of twelve feet wide and forty feet long. Other reports of Stevens’ journeys, however, refer to a “big tepee” or “a great tepee some thirty feet across” in which “the medicine man kept up a continual drumming” on one of his visits. These probably allude to the circular pavilion, which perhaps co-existed with a large shabandawan just as it later (in Hallowell’s time) co-existed with the Wabano longhouse and sweatlodge in which Fair Wind carried on his repertoire of medicinal practices.

Stevens’ most detailed accounts pertained to his visit of July 1914. Helpfully, he also hinted that the death of a son and grandson was fresh in the minds of the Pauingassi people at the time and emphasized Fair Wind’s drumming:

We went into the camp . . . We asked them if we might hold a service and, as they consented, we did so. Before we left, they began to tell us of the loss of friends during the year. A young couple had lost their first-born, an old woman her grandchild, and we felt our hearts drawn together as we talked to one another of these things and discerned the longing of their spiritual natures.

Fair Wind was not there, but farther up the lake, Stevens met him returning home from hunting ducks. “As soon as he got home,” Stevens recollected, “he at once began to drum, and kept it up all night in hopes of counterchecking the effect of our visit.” The missionary party heard the sound at their encampment five miles away and “were sorry to think that the devil was trying to eat up the good seed we had sown.”<sup>43</sup>

Given his Christian dualism and evangelical concerns, Stevens naturally conceived of religion in oppositional terms: pagans and the devil versus Christians and Jesus. If he had examined the Drum Dance more closely, he might have seen that Fair Wind did not think in such dichotomies. While the drum served as consolation for losses and a means to communicate with the spirits of the dead, it was surrounded by a rich, syncretic

---

42. Stevens, unpublished autobiography, 49.

43. *Ibid.*, 50; Stevens letter of 27 January 1915, published in the *Missionary Bulletin*, 11 (March-June 1915): 245; the grandson and firstborn whose loss Stevens mentions could both refer to Fair Wind’s grandson (Stevens may in fact have met Fair Wind’s mother who died during the following year). In a letter of 18 September 1917, found in the *Missionary Bulletin*, 14 (Jan.-Mar. 1918): 35, Stevens published a slightly different account of the 1914 visit which seems to incorporate some details of his 1913 trip. The conflation persists in the *United Church Record and Missionary Review* (November 1925): 20, in an unsigned article entitled “Namawun - ‘Fair Wind,’” which mentions the “great tepee some thirty feet across.”

theology. At the ceremony which Hallowell observed in 1933, the bringing of food offerings for the dead was followed by a short speech from Fair Wind: "When a person has lost a brother, a child, or some other relative, we call upon them to look down upon us. They have been on this earth once, and before that they were sent from above to come on this earth. Jesus, too, came from above to be the boss of the earth."

Fair Wind's son, Angus, the head drummer, also spoke of the grief he had felt at the death of his nephew. (Being himself the childless eldest son, he may have acted as another father to the boy, although it is also possible that, speaking in 1933, he was referring to a different child.) While he was hunting, a voice had spoken to him as it had to his father: "I'll give you something to ease your mind and that of others. But you must take care and carry things through as you are told." The voice mentioned a minister's name [Stevens, one wonders?]. But, Angus added, "the minister did not tell me half of what he should have told me. He did not even know what pines [Thunderbird] was . . . I know something different on account of what I have dreamed."

After the final dance, "the drummers stood up, Fair Wind came forward, and the whole group sang a Christian hymn. Fair Wind lifted his hand in benediction, in the Christian manner, and Jesus was mentioned again." Afterwards, Hallowell asked whether the dance was a gift of the *djibaiyak* (the spirits of the dead) or of a *pawagan* (dream helper). The answer was no: "It came directly from God." As Hallowell concluded, "this dance . . . illustrates extremely well how diverse strands of belief and practice can be welded together under the influence of a strong personality, and yet still kept within the framework of the *Saulteaux* interpretation of the universe."<sup>44</sup>

Hallowell's representation in 1933 contrasted vividly with the Fair Wind who, a few years earlier, was portrayed by an unnamed writer to readers of the *United Church Record* and *Missionary Review*. A full page on "Namawun, the Indian Medicine Man" divided his career into three parts. The first part retold F.G. Stevens' encounters with the "medicine man" as published in earlier mission letters. Part two, "Fair Wind in Trouble," told of his "incantations and threats of evil voyage to all who passed." At his worst, he seized, one time, some Hudson's Bay Company property from some Deer Lake freighters who were passing his settlement and got into difficulty with the Northwest Mounted Police. In 1918, however, he attended a religious meeting held by Stevens at Little Grand Rapids and spoke at the end, saying, "As my old religion seems to bring me trouble, I think I will try this new religion." Part three ("Namawun - the Christian Patriarch") asserted that when Fair Wind got home,

He ordered all his family to be Christians too, and in the old tepee held services for prayer, with a Bible he had secured laid on a table before him. So the whole family of thirty-five souls . . . began the new way. A year later the tepee was deserted, log cabins were built and one cabin was built for a church. The drum was replaced by a church bell, in 1920, and the old wigwam and dancing tent disappeared.<sup>45</sup>

---

44. Hallowell, "Spirits of the Dead," 166-168.

This three-part drama was compelling but full of partial truths. Fair Wind had doubtless harassed the Deer Lakers and spoken at Stevens' meeting. By 1925, he also had a church bell. But a photograph dating from about then shows the bell mounted, not on a church (although a nearby log house might have had that use), but on a small wooden tower next to the round drum pavilion which, if it had disappeared for a while, had been replaced.<sup>46</sup> Fair Wind's descendants at Pauingassi recalled that along with his Wabano and drum ceremonies, he rang the bell on Sundays to call everyone together, and he would preach and pray.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, Fair Wind was not the convert Stevens would have wished. He did not order his family's conversion — an act which would have exceeded his authority as an Ojibwa leader in any case. Rather, he integrated elements of Christianity into his own powerful spiritual repertory. The ambiguity and versatility of some of the religious symbols upon which he drew gave interpretive scope to both Fair Wind himself, and to outsiders who selectively read his activities in terms that they found congenial. On the drum itself, for example, outlined in blue, was a design that Westerners would call a Maltese cross (a standard Christian cruciform). Adam Owen at Pauingassi said, however, that Fair Wind called it *gaagige-anang*, "forever star," and that he was the one who knew its meaning because of his special relation to the drum. His name for it challenges Christian assumptions, and also hints at a parallel with Maggie Wilson's Drum Dance at Emo, to the south; she called her dance the Star Dance.<sup>48</sup>

The writer in the United Church Record in 1925 made an interpretive leap when he reported that the church bell had replaced Fair Wind's drum at Pauingassi. He was correct that the drum had departed, but the reasons for its departure were beyond his ken. In Wisconsin in the 1950s, Menomini drummers told James Slotkin, "Them Drums, they keep travelling, keep travelling. They got to keep them so long; maybe four years." The Drum Dance was intended to be passed from one community to another, ideally in a clockwise direction replicating the correct movement of dancers around a drum.<sup>49</sup> Actual patterns of transmission varied, and were less consistent on the edges of the Drum Dance region. But the known dances in Manitoba appear to describe a clockwise arc from

---

45. "Namawun," *United Church Record and Missionary Review* (Nov. 1925): 20. Thanks to Lacey Sanders for spotting this item.

46. Gerald Malaher, *The North I Love* (Winnipeg, 1984), 56. We could not locate the original of this photograph, drawn to our attention by Robert Brightman. A log building on the left may have been the "church" although Malaher's picture caption noted, "This group of Indians . . . refused to be converted by missionaries." Malaher worked in forestry and fire protection in the region in the 1920s.

47. Jacob Owen and Adam Owen both recalled Fair Wind's use of the bell (interviews with Maureen Matthews, 16 and 17 Oct. 1992); it now hangs by the door of the Mennonite mission church at Pauingassi. Jacob Owen, a member of that church, felt that Fair Wind overreached himself; he would "try everything he thought he know it all himself, that's no good in that . . . Don't work for two gods, two bosses."

48. Landes, *Ojibwa Religion*, 208.

49. Vennum, *The Ojibwa Dance Drum*, 70-71.



Jackhead, Bloodvein, and Little Grand Rapids to Pauingassi, and on to Poplar Hill, Ontario.

Hallowell did not fully sort out the story of Fair Wind's drum, perhaps in part because he first saw the ceremony at Poplar Hill in 1932; he did not reach Pauingassi until 1933. He realized that the Poplar Hill people had purchased the ceremony so that they might "share the benefits of the dream blessings of Fair Wind and Angus." But they had also purchased the original drum. The drum he saw at Pauingassi was its younger "brother," a replacement; and Fair Wind's drum had "travelled," as it was supposed to.<sup>50</sup> In about 1920, a Poplar Hill man named Omishooch (James Owen), a relative of the other Owens, had visited Pauingassi and bought the drum. He was the son of Lynx (Pishiw, also known as Kepekiishikweyaash or Sandy Owen), who in turn was the eldest son of Great Moose and his first wife, Emihkwaan. That is, Lynx was a half-brother of Fair Wind, and their sons were parallel cousins, classified as brothers in Ojibwa kin terminology.

Lynx had two wives (who were sisters) and sixteen known children, most of them born at Stout Lake, a wide section of the Berens River about thirty miles east of Pauingassi and fifteen miles west of Poplar Hill. He died in the spring of 1921. It was at about that time that his sons, Omishooch (the eldest), Kepeyaash (Chooshi or Joseph Owen Moose), and Keshiyyaash (John Owen), established Fair Wind's drum at Poplar Hill and built it a round pavilion like the one at Pauingassi. The passing of the drum involved considerable outlays of goods by the recipients as they acquired the ceremonial paraphernalia, were taught the songs that they needed to know, and hosted the donors; Hallowell was told that the price was so high that as of 1932, the Poplar Hill people had not completed their payments.<sup>51</sup> Fair Wind and Angus sometimes came to play the drum with their kinsmen at Poplar Hill; their visits are still remembered.<sup>52</sup>

When Hallowell visited Pauingassi in 1933, Fair Wind was over eighty and blind, but a powerfully impressive figure. Hallowell photographed him and his wife, Koowin (who died the next year), in front of the magnificent Wabano pavilion which overlooked the lake on a site now occupied by the Pauingassi school. He also took group photographs of the younger generations of Owens and their spouses and offspring who had roles in Fair Wind's Wabano and Drum Dance ceremonies, and of the round pavilion close by.

---

50. Hallowell, "Spirits of the Dead," 169 and 402, n. 43; Jacob Owen to Gary Butikofer, 28 March 1977; Mrs. Turtle Strang to Gary Butikofer, 1 April 1977. James Owen Moose (Inini), the son of Omishooch who introduced the drum to Poplar Hill, stated to Butikofer (16 Feb. 1972) that his father made the drum, but the testimony from the other older informants appears more convincing, given other evidence.

51. Butikofer, unpublished family histories. Hallowell, "Spirits of the Dead," 402, n. 43. Thomas Vennum verified for us the strong links between the Drum Dance songs of the upper U.S. midwest and those still remembered at Pauingassi and Poplar Hill.

52. For example, Yellowbird (Mrs. Mikinaak Moose) to Maureen Matthews, Poplar Hill, June 1992.

While there, he was privileged to participate in a three-day Wabanowiwin, after which Angus and his fellow drummers performed the Drum Dance with the drum they had built to replace its Poplar Hill brother.

Hallowell's pictures and texts vividly express Fair Wind's position among his people in the 1930s. Clearly, his standing was grounded in extensive parental, brotherly, and marital ties reaching back to Great Moose and his wives. Fair Wind benefitted, too, from the spiritual powers that were thought to be helping a man if his family flourished and grew, and if numerous of its members lived a long time. In their study of the Cranes, Edward and Mary Black Rogers commented on "their origin from one extraordinarily large family most of whom lived to reproduce," and suggested that they may "represent a pattern of group evolution that has occurred repeatedly among Subarctic Algonquians."<sup>53</sup> The rise of the Owens at Pauingassi appears comparable in some respects and owed at least some of its dynamics to Fair Wind's membership in the family of Great Moose. Families were not equal in power, and their fortunes varied across the generations.

As a family-based local community grew, it might be closely allied to some neighbours, and involved in rivalry and medicine wars with others. The Owens were seen as threatening to the Deer Lakers and to some at Little Grand Rapids, as were the Cranes to their neighbours. Such patterns evidently went back a long time. In 1815, George Holdsworth, Hudson's Bay Company trader at Berens River, observed that the Ojibwa in the region did not show strong jealousies over territory as such, even though their migrations led them to encroach on one another's lands. However, he noted, "Feuds and animosities frequently exist between particular families, which not infrequently terminates in murder" [or more accurately, accusations of murder, given the personalized explanations which, as Hallowell found, were often assigned to disease and death in Ojibwa thought].<sup>54</sup> Similarly, there was a dark side to the powers of Fair Wind and the Owens if they found themselves injured or threatened by others, although good medicine and consolation appeared dominant in Fair Wind's activities.<sup>55</sup>

The evidence tells us much about the sort of leader that Fair Wind was; it also hints at what he was not. He was never described in English as a "chief" since he never carried that political role in dealing with non-Aboriginal people. In this respect, he offers a contrast to Peguis, the "Colony Chief" of Red River, who was born about three

---

53. Rogers and Rogers, "Who Were the Cranes?", 172

54. Holdsworth, "Reports on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winipic, fo. 6d; Hallowell, *Ojibwa*, 95-96.

55. Fair Wind would use his powers to harm others "only sometimes when someone did something to cross him" (Jacob Owen to Maureen Matthews, 17 October 1992, Pauingassi). Contests between medicine men are common themes in Northern Algonquian traditions; see, for example, Thomas Fiddler, ed. James R. Stevens, *Legends from the Forest* (Moonbeam, Ont., 1985)

generations earlier.<sup>56</sup> Both men lived for nine decades, but Peguis spent most of his life in intensive interactions with incoming whites. Fair Wind was only thirteen when Peguis died in 1864. But his circumstances, his opportunities, and the demands placed upon him were principally of Ojibwa making; he did not have to cope with Red River colonists or Anglican missionaries, the Metis, or HBC Governor George Simpson. The nature of his career did not demand that he be construed as a chief; he did not negotiate regularly with white men except in the old and familiar context of the fur trade.

And even though Fair Wind lived most of his life under the Indian Act, he never became that sort of chief either. If Pauingassi had been a separate band and reserve in his lifetime, as it is now, he surely would have been its chief; but his community was considered part of the Little Grand Rapids Band, just as Poplar Hill, up the river, was subsumed under Pikangikum. This fact has made such communities relatively invisible in some kinds of records, complicating their historiography and muting their claims to governmental attentions. On the positive side, though, they were spared having to elect their own chiefs and councils along Indian Affairs guidelines, and they carried on for a few more decades without the often divisive politics that accompany band offices and their incipient bureaucracies.

The category of chief is also problematical at a more fundamental level. To be made a "chief" whether by Lord Selkirk, by Indian Affairs mandate, or by hagiographical popular writers is also to be made into a certain kind of stereotypic Other. Anglophones seem to need the category, but it is opaque and usually unexamined, while connotations of equally unexamined tribes, feather headdresses, and proud horsemen of the Plains trail behind it.

If Fair Wind and leaders like him escaped being chiefs, however, they did not escape "othering" of another sort. The Christian missionaries made them into their own stereotypic Others; Indian medicine men and conjurors with their pagan drums and assuredly evil powers. They also embedded them in a dualistic and progressivist history of their own making; the three-staged outline of Fair Wind's career from Medicine Man to Christian Patriarch in the United Church Record of 1925 was a classic example. The linear upward course of missions was unquestioned. The departure of the drum signified the rise of Christianity; what other meaning could it have? And by inference, medicine men (and Indians in general) were doomed relics of another time and place, outside the change and progress of "real" history.<sup>57</sup>

---

56. See Laura L. Peers, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Chief: Saulteaux in the Red River Settlement, 1812-1833," *Papers of the 18th Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, 1987).

57. Film makers as well as governments and missionaries have been implicated in perpetuating stereotypes of chiefs and medicine men. The film, "The Silent Enemy," a drama about Ojibwa of northern Ontario, was released in 1930, the same year that Hallowell began his Ojibwa fieldwork; it is a classic example (Milestone Film and Video, New York). See also Maureen

Historians and anthropologists have not escaped the othering syndrome. Calvin Martin has construed Aboriginal people as “people of myth” who operate on another plane from the non-indigenous “people of history.” A.I. Hallowell himself, writing about his journey up the Berens River, entitled chapter 1 of *The Ojibwa of Berens River* “The Living Past in the Canadian Wilderness,” remarking on the upriver people as isolated, unacculturated, and living essentially as they always had, though he did not deny them a history. Most recently, Rupert Ross, in a popular book based on his legal experience in the same region, drew upon similar tropes, imagining the Ojibwa as isolated people who had lived on their own forever: “nothing but wilderness . . . nowhere else to go, no other context in which to seek fulfillment,” where great-grandparents and their descendants would carry on in exactly the same places, “in the same ways forever, just as it had always been.”<sup>58</sup>

These images are not helpful to our understanding and appreciation of Fair Wind or the many other Ojibwa leaders like him. Nor is it helpful to cast him as a “traditional” Indian leader, if there is such a thing. “Traditional” in most writing is another stereotypic, othering term; it implies a contrast with “modern” people who have changed, adapted to an outside world, become acculturated. Yet traditions, as we need to be reminded time and again, are continually being constructed. Compared to such men as Peguis or Big Bear, Fair Wind was able to carry on in a more fully indigenous context. But his story makes clear that he was not, on that account, isolated, unchanging in his ways, or hidebound in his outlook. His Ojibwa world had its own dynamism and cosmopolitanism of which white outsiders (including Hallowell) knew almost nothing.

A few closing thoughts about this story come to mind. Fair Wind’s relatives whom we met in Pauingassi, Poplar Hill, and Pikangikum welcomed our interest in their kinsman, and their perspectives have been essential to this effort to tell of his life (errors and misinterpretations being our responsibility). They now live in a world that seems very different from his, one in which cultural discontinuities and crises sometimes seem endemic. Yet their clear memories of both Fair Wind and Hallowell, and the accord between those memories and Hallowell’s writings, reflect the extent to which culture and history are carried on in people’s minds (they also attest to the solidity of Hallowell’s observations). Their persistence leads us to agree with Edward and Mary Black Rogers in rejecting “the idea that Indian cultures changed so rapidly and radically on contact with Western society that one can learn little about them from twentieth century Indian people.” The Rogers’ experience with the Weagamow Lake Ojibwa showed “change to

---

Matthews’ look at Hollywood Westerns in “Isinamowin, The White Man’s Indian” (CBC Radio, Ideas, 1991)

58. Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, 1987), 194-197; Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality* (Markham, 1992), 89. For analysis of this syndrome and its deep roots in both Christian and anthropological thinking, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983), 25-32.

be surprisingly superficial, and 'memory' to reside not only in explicit knowledge but also in patterned ways of thinking and reacting, for the most part unselfconsciously."<sup>59</sup>

Some basic issues in writing Native biography also recur for all who undertake it. First, oral historians would not tell the story of Fair Wind as it is told here; we recognize that this account does not conform to an Ojibwa oral genre. But the range of information that it brings together has already drawn great interest from Native people in the region. In pooling their knowledge and perspectives (a process only begun here) with other kinds of source materials, a composite life history emerges that, despite its gaps, may help to counter some venerable stereotypes about medicine men and people without history.

Second, a principal risk in this telling is that Fair Wind may now join the pantheon of great Indian chiefs, in spite of our cautions. To write about one individual at length is to create a personage who then becomes knowable and hence more widely known, a hero to those in search of heroes. We cannot control that process; but we can warn about the distortions it may introduce. For those in search of other such personages among the Ojibwa, their stories are there to be written. Their tellings with due care could in fact help to demystify Fair Wind as individualized hero, for they would reveal that while he was outstanding, he was not unique; other Ojibwa leaders with similar careers have also left their mark. The challenge, given the gaps, biases, distortions, partial truths, and neglect from which our sources so often suffer, is to move beyond the heroics and stereotypes to a more encompassing and stereoscopic view, to resurrect Fair Wind and his peers without deifying them or doing violence to the historical contexts which gave them their significance in the first place.

---

59. Rogers and Rogers, "Who Were the Cranes?," 168.